

Consultation **Summary**

2025 Key Council Documents



Acknowledgement of Country

Macedon Ranges Shire Council acknowledges the **Dja Dja Wurrung**, **Taungurung** and **Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung** Peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and waterways. Council recognises their living cultures and ongoing connection to Country and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Council also acknowledges local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander residents of Macedon Ranges for their ongoing contribution to the diverse culture of our community.

Artwork by Taungurung artist Maddie Moser. *Artwork used with permission.*



Contents

Background	5
Purpose of this document	6
Community Voice Engagement Project	7
Your Say	
Existing documents	10
Community Assembly	11
Business sector engagement	16
Health and disability sector engagement	17



Background

Macedon Ranges Shire Council (Council), like all councils across Victoria, is legislatively required to complete a deliberative engagement process to review or renew key documents by 31 October in the year following a general election (in this case, 31 October 2025).

These key documents outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* are:

- The **Community Vision**, a document describing the community's aspirations for the future of the municipality.
- The **Council Plan**, a document identifying community needs and local issues, describing strategic directions that guide Council's response.
- The **Financial Plan**, a document outlining the finances and financial strategy needed to realise the contents of the Council Plan and other strategies.
- The **Asset Plan**, a document outlining guidance on the maintenance, renewal, upgrade or decommissioning of existing assets, as well as acquisition of new assets in the future.
- The **Revenue and Rating Plan**, a document outlining how Council intends to raise revenue and apply the rating structure to fund services, programs and infrastructure.

For our Council, a decision was made early in the process – which started in earnest back in June 2024 – to create one master document comprising the Community Vision, Council Plan, and two other legislatively required documents: the **Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan**, and the **Disability Action Plan**.

This move will ensure that the Community Vision for our shire guides everything we do, while embedding health, wellbeing, disability access, and inclusion across all that we do. It also makes for a document that is easier to read, access and reference, increasing transparency and accountability.

Purpose of **this document**

This document aims to provide a high-level summary of the engagement undertaken with key stakeholders and the community, and the resulting feedback which helped inform the renewal of the key documents mentioned above.

The deliberative engagement element of this process centred around the Community Assembly: an independently recruited and selected group of Macedon Ranges residents targeted to be demographically representative of the broader community. The in-person sessions were also independently facilitated, with Council staff attending to provide expert guidance and insights.

Complementing this Assembly were a number of targeted engagements with key stakeholders of particular relevance – health, disability and business groups – in addition to broader public consultation, promoted and facilitated through Council’s Your Say online engagement platform.

Council staff also engaged with the Macedon Ranges’ three Traditional Owner Groups – DJAARA, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, and Taungurung Land and Waters Council – with feedback particularly informing First Nations terminology and objectives.

All feedback received was summarised by Council staff and briefed up to Council’s Executive Leadership Team and Councillors for their consideration. Council staff then worked with Councillors over a number of internal briefing sessions to help further refine the content of the renewed key documents.

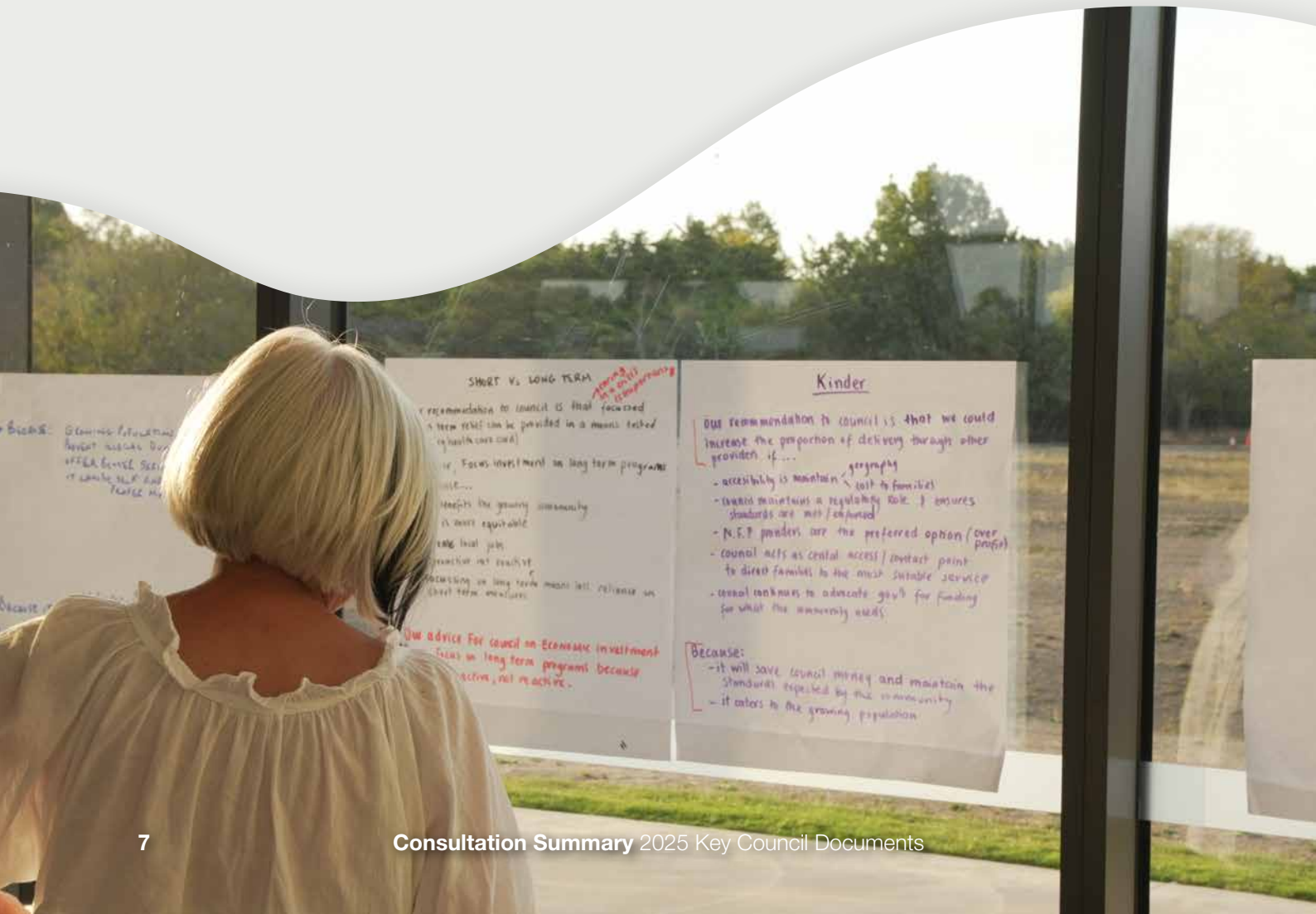
Community Voice Engagement

The Community Voice Engagement Project was designed to gather input from groups in our community who may not usually participate in Council's regular engagement activities. This included children, young people, older adults and people with disabilities.

The project's aim was to ensure experiences and priorities from these groups could provide early insights to inform the refresh of important strategic documents, including the Community Vision, Council Plan, Asset Plan, Financial Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and Disability Action Plan.

The project gathered feedback from 329 people. This included 129 survey responses and a further 200 participants through interviews and focus group sessions. The engagement asked people to rank their priorities, explain why the priorities they chose mattered to them, and share their vision for the future of the Macedon Ranges.

The data collected provides a solid foundation for Council's planning, and can be expanded upon through future community engagement efforts that will aim to hear from the broader community to continue to inform the development of Council's strategic documents.

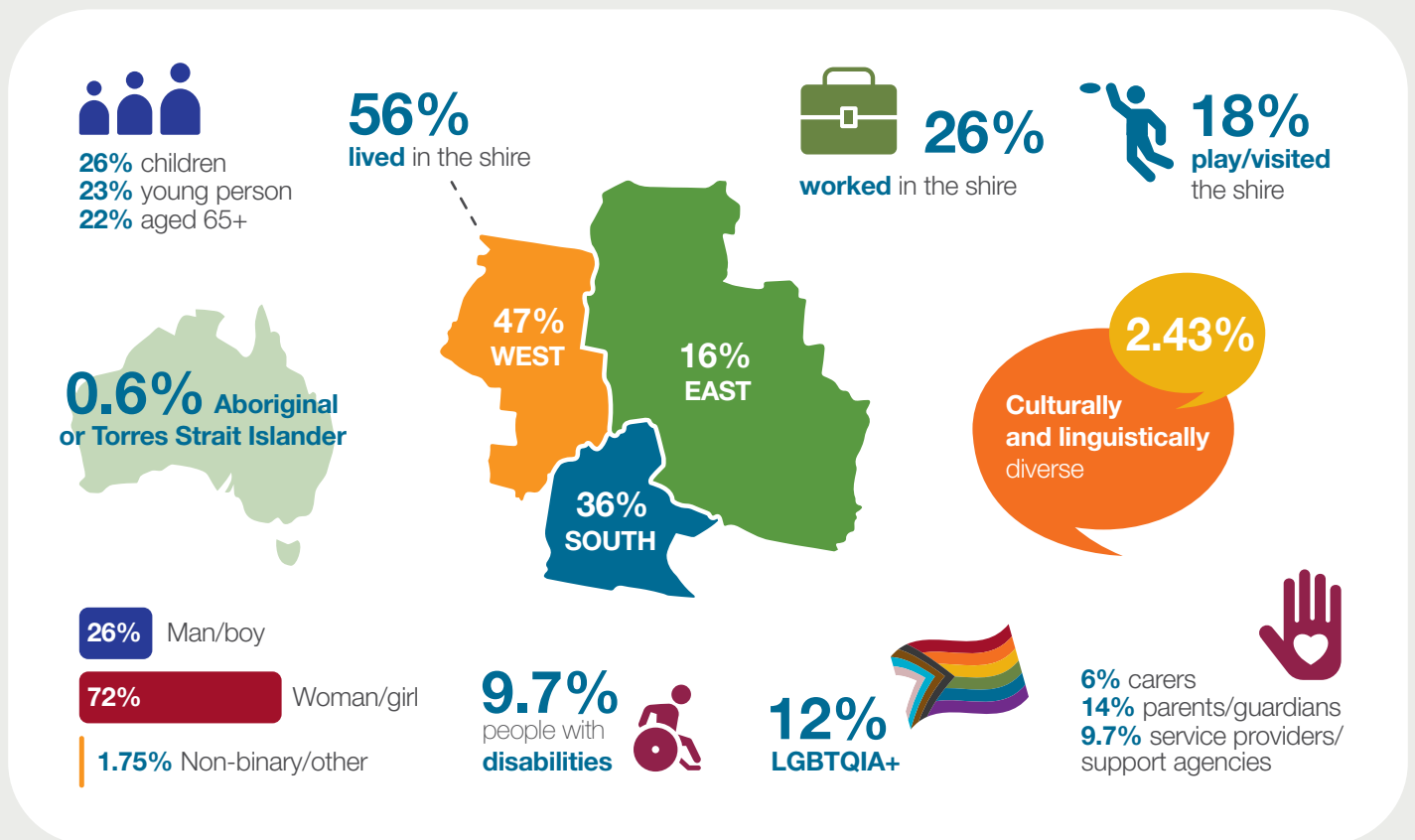


Demographics

Demographic data was collected more comprehensively through survey responses and only group-based demographics were collected during facilitated conversations (for example, age range and ward of school-based groups).

As a result, some of the following demographics are relevant to the survey only, but provide useful information to understand who may have engaged with the Project:

Figure 1. Demographics of the group



Key findings

Figure 2. Top five priority areas for each category

Community Vision and Council Plan

	Parks and Open Space	102 votes
	Transport and Parking	92 votes
	Families, Youth and Children	84 votes
	Leisure and Recreation	84 votes
	Diversity and Inclusion - including disability	72 votes

Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and Disability Action Plan

	Ensuring Access to Nutritious and Affordable Food	123 votes
	Creating a Community Where Everyone Feels Safe	112 votes
	Fostering Strong Social Connections and Inclusion	108 votes
	Nurturing Mental Wellbeing and Emotional Resilience	101 votes
	Ensuring Access to Safe and Affordable Housing	96 votes

Your Say

Existing documents

Launching on 5 February and closing for submissions on 18 March 2025, this extended six-week period of community consultation focused on each of the existing key documents, asking questions relevant to each to get a litmus test as to how much the current direction and objectives resonated.

A total of 27 online contributions were received through the Your Say online engagement platform, as well as 2 written submissions received by email.

The 27 online contributions were generated through 861 visits to the Your Say page, from 639 visitors. Of these contributions, the following responses were received for questions on individual key documents within the survey:

- **Community Vision – 20**
- **Council Plan – 14**
- **Financial Plan* - 10**
- **Revenue and Rating Plan* - 11**
- **Asset Plan – 15**

* Noting that contributors who selected the Financial Plan were also automatically prompted to complete the Revenue and Rating Plan, and vice versa, given the connection of both plans.

When asked about how well the existing Community Vision statement reflected with their own vision of the shire on a scale of between 1 and 5, the majority of respondents (45 per cent) submitted a rating of 3, with a close balance of responses either side.

Central to most submissions in relation to the Community Vision were protection of natural environment and rural character.

The consultation on all existing documents saw the following 5 key themes emerge most consistently:

1. Protection of natural environment and biodiversity
2. Addressing land and use planning, including housing targets
3. Addressing the impacts of climate change
4. Investment in built infrastructure including roads, recreational facilities and bike/ walking paths
5. Acknowledging and investing in community safety.

Community **Assembly**

Recruitment

The independence of the Community Assembly process – in participants being independently recruited, selected and facilitated – allowed Council to compare our broad strategic direction with the perspectives and ideas provided by participants.

Council engaged the services of Sortition Foundation to independently recruit the community assembly, to represent different demographics within Macedon Ranges.

As part of the recruitment process, Council produced invitations for prospective panellists as well as an Easy English version invitation created by Scope. These invitations were delivered via annual rates notices, to ensure they reached the target audience.

An honorarium of up to \$600 was offered to participants (\$150 per session attended, with a minimum of three sessions to be attended).

Following an expressions of interest process and independent facilitation/selection by Sortition, 45 willing Assembly participants were initially onboarded to participate in the process. Participants were randomly selected based on meeting different demographic or other targets to try to best represent the broader shire.

Through initial communication of dates and venue, 10 of these participants subsequently withdrew from the process and were replaced with 10 alternate participants.

Sessions

Council partnered with Max Hardy Consulting and Michelle Weston Consulting to design and deliver the Community Assembly, which included four deliberative workshop sessions held in person at the Macedon Ranges Sports Precinct pavilion in New Gisborne on Wednesday 12 March (3 ½ hours), Saturday 15 March (5 ½ hours), Saturday 29 March (5 ½ hours) and Wednesday 2 April 2025 (3 ½ hours).

Prior to the first session, a number of participants had flagged they may be unavailable for one of the four sessions, which was noted in advance. Final attendance of the sessions is noted in the following table, based on being in attendance from the start of sessions. The majority of participants stayed for the entirety of sessions, with only a few instances of participants not staying for the entire session.

Six participants did not participate in any of the sessions, with many citing changes in circumstances or availability prior to the first session.

Figure 3. Demographics of Community Assembly

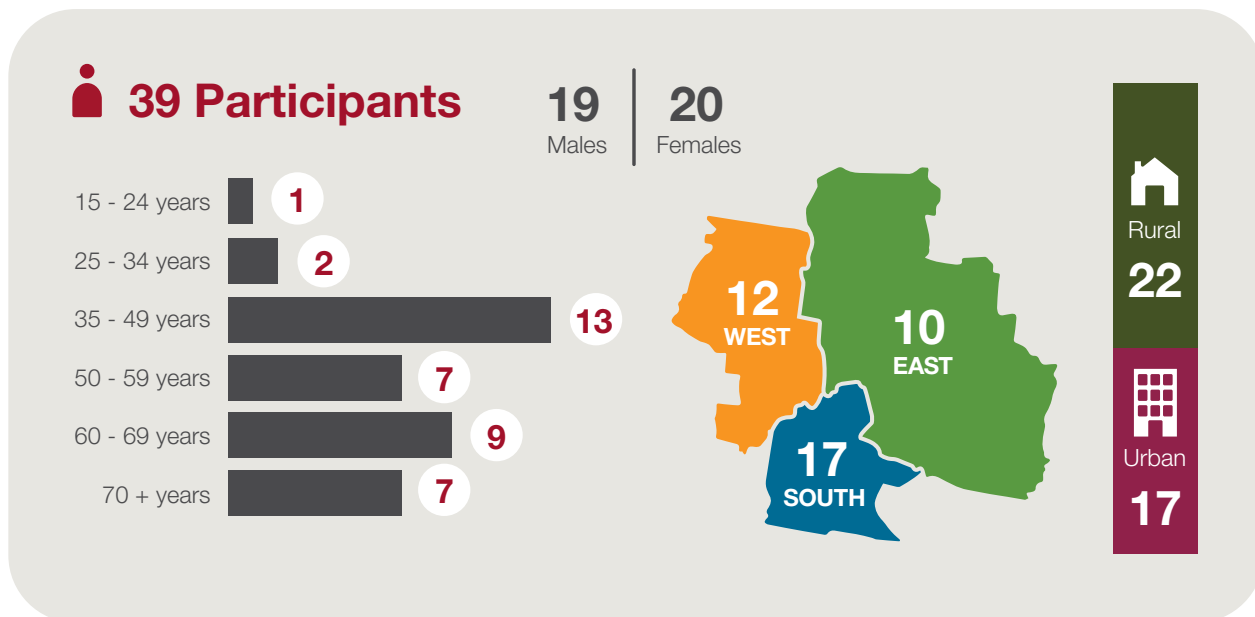


Table 1. Participant attendance

	First session	Second session	Third session	Fourth session
Attended	37	35	33	34
Did not attend	8	10	12	11

Communication

Following initial independent selection and onboarding via Sortition, Council established a shared inbox accessible to a number of Council staff, to provide a central point to view and respond to any participant queries.

Assembly participants were communicated with via this email initially with details shared of the process, venue and dates as they were confirmed.

A dedicated, private Your Say online hub (separate to the earlier cited public-facing hub) was created specifically for Community Assembly participants, to provide a secure online space where Council could share updates and information relevant to the process directly with participants.

Following the creation of the Your Say online hub for participants prior to the first session, Assembly participants were communicated with via email campaigns from the Your Say platform with further updates, including documents and further information uploaded to the Your Say page.

More often than not, email updates were also followed up with a direct phone call or text message to Assembly participants via the contact numbers provided, to ensure that emails were not being missed or prompting participants to check their junk mail.

Outputs

The Community Assembly deliberated on some of the most pressing and complex issues and opportunities impacting Council, for its planning now and into the future.

A range of deliberation techniques were used throughout the workshops, including presentations and panel discussions from a range of leading subject matter experts from within Council.

Participants took part in a range of group activities, including deliberating on real-life dilemmas, scenarios and trade-offs. Interactive polling was used throughout using Mentimeter (an online polling tool) used to measure sentiment and preference levels of the group throughout the process.

Assembly participants were provided with an overarching remit for deliberation at the start of the process, informed by Council (including Councillors and Council staff) and broader community engagement throughout 2024 and 2025. This remit was:

How should Council prioritise its services, allocate resources, and plan for future growth to meet community needs? ... (while at the same time addressing financial constraints and ensuring long-term liveability and sustainability?)

The two key outputs of the Community Assembly were:

1. A proposed revision of the existing Community Vision statement, and
2. Nine key messages of recommendation for Council, based on key topics of deliberation.

The Community Assembly worked to refresh the current Community Vision statement previously endorsed in 2021 to a shorter, more concise version to:

Macedon Ranges Shire Council: A regional community protecting the environment, supporting local businesses and caring for our people.

After deliberating on a range of complex topics and real-life dilemma scenarios for Council, in the fourth (and last) session, the Community Assembly presented nine key messages of recommendation to Council.

It was emphasised to the Assembly that these recommendations, while specific to the scenarios they considered, would not act as definitive decisions that Council would be forced to act on. Rather, that the discussions and thought processes that got them to the recommendations would provide valuable insights for Council if facing potential similar scenarios into the future.

At a high level these nine key messages, associated with topics deliberated on, were:

1. A recommendation to increase Council's resource recovery facilities – such as providing a new facility in Gisborne – and focus on improved efficiency and monetising. The reasoning was to support the growing population, provide a better service to residents and prevent illegal rubbish dumping. There was a desire to make the service more affordable and accessible with discussion around a new facility in the south of the shire.
2. A recommendation to fund Council's declared climate emergency, including sustainability compliance for new properties

and facilities. The reasoning was to focus on mitigation to solve the problem, rather than adaptation later on. New developments and housing builds need to be orientated and planned with climate consequences in mind.

3. A recommendation for Council to investigate short-term economic relief in a means-tested way, but to also focus on long-term investment. Multiple reasons were cited including creating local jobs and being proactive, rather than reactive.
4. A recommendation that if Council were to consider outsourcing the delivery of kindergarten services, that there be strong caveats to this including that not-for-profit providers are preferred, and that Council continues to act as the central point of contact. The reasoning was to save Council money, while importantly maintaining high standards of service and catering to the growing population.
5. A recommendation to improve communication on events and festivals, focusing on health and wellbeing. The reasoning was to save Council money, while maintaining standards and catering to the growing population. It was recommended that community led is better for social cohesion, but Council has an important role to play.
6. A recommendation to prioritise community need in relation to benefit, not demand. This was in relation to the Community Assembly's principles of what should guide tough funding decisions, with the reasoning being that just because something has been requested, does not mean it is needed.
7. A recommendation to better utilise existing Council facilities, encouraging a multi-use approach. The reasoning was to save money as opposed to always building new assets, with ideas raised of community group-led management and a central booking system through Council.
8. A recommendation for Council to proactively promote social housing through planning and investment in

Council-owned properties, and that developments must offer genuine options for affordable housing. The reasoning was that the Macedon Ranges should welcome people from different socio-economic backgrounds. There were discussions around what Council's role is in this space, and it can be seen as a State Government issue. Ideas around regulation changes to support developers to produce social housing and co-investment were put forward.

9. A recommendation for Council to regularly perform proper maintenance on roads, while ensuring footpaths are accessible. The reasoning was to prioritise road safety and not make accessibility an afterthought. This also extended to investment in active transport, Electric Vehicle infrastructure and that these items should be essential in long term planning.

Participants reviewed Council's proposed new community vision themes and strategic directions, suggesting a range of additions and concerns: These included:

- **Climate Emergency & Sustainability:**
A stronger focus on addressing the Climate Emergency and prioritising climate mitigation.
- **Community Vision & Inclusivity:**
Feedback emphasised retaining inclusivity and broader community access in the vision.
- **Regional Environment & Development:**
Concerns about maintaining the region's character amid growth, including limits on development in some areas.
- **Themes & Strategic Directions:**
Some participants felt the new themes were less direct and meaningful compared to previous versions, preferring more detailed and specific language.

When asked to define success, the following high level success indicators were highlighted by participants and included:

- **Roads, Infrastructure, and Safety:**
Improved roads, footpaths, clean streets, and safe infrastructure.
- **Community Engagement and Information:**
Increased access to community information, more events, and better documentation of engagement.
- **Council Efficiency and Public Sentiment:**
Enhanced council efficiency, improved satisfaction, and positive community feedback.

- **Environmental and Sustainability Goals:**
Stronger focus on climate action, renewable energy, and environmental protection.
- **Social Issues and Wellbeing:**
Addressing homelessness, improving police support for mental health, and building quality housing.



Business sector engagement

Council officers arranged a meeting in late March 2025 with representatives from local business & tourism associations and industry groups, to obtain insights from these groups which boast broad business member bases that span across the shire.

Based on feedback received from that meeting, a number of key action areas were suggested as a starting point for theming the commentary provided:

1. Activation, maintenance of public spaces that centre around economic activity, with intention to increase aesthetic (noted specific references to signage)
2. Facilitation of connection between local businesses and information sharing between business to support local and visiting spenders to navigate and enjoy towns.
3. Promote more local attractions (i.e parks) as part of visitor economy and invest in signage and information sharing to enable visitors to engage with these spaces.
4. Facilitate the activation of vacant shopfronts
5. Facilitate and support the delivery of priorities identified through thriving villages and town centre action plans
6. Review and improve council processes for businesses navigating planning, permits, and compliance activities with a focus on providing a supportive environment for businesses to engage with Council
7. Work collaboratively and productively with business associations, facilitating the collaborative identification of community led initiatives/activities
8. Identify opportunities to support businesses through cost of living and general downturn in discretionary spending
9. Workforce shortages/staff retention and attraction, particularly skilled workers/trades (not just tourism)
10. Importance of maintaining unique character for business/tourism in face of population growth/development
11. Building/supporting community capacity to contribute to the activation of towns
12. Cost of rents - linked to housing affordability issues, ensure included in thinking on broader affordability

Health and disability sector engagement

Council officers convened a health and disability sector 'round table' on Wednesday 5 March, with 20 stakeholders in attendance representing local organisations, schools and services with a stake in health, wellbeing, and disability access.

To identify which of these factors were most important to address for health and wellbeing, we presented community feedback and research to local community organisations and services. These organisations collectively identified priority areas for us to act on collaboratively.

The following priorities were identified as most important to act on to support our communities' long-term wellbeing:

- Loneliness and social inclusion*
- Housing
- Food security*
- Diversity and inclusion
- Access to and provision of services

This group also identified the following areas of additional importance:

- Climate and emergencies*
- Transport, including active transport*
- Alcohol and gambling*
- Gender-based violence (family violence)*

Priorities with an asterisk * are also included in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2024-2027.



Kyneton Administration Centre

129 Mollison Street, Kyneton

Hours: Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm.

Gisborne Administration Centre

40 Robertson Street, Gisborne

Hours: Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm

Romsey Hub

96–100 Main St, Romsey

Hours: Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm

Woodend Community Centre

Corner Forest and High streets, Woodend

Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 12pm to 5pm

Contact Us

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Find us on:    

If you need help to speak or hear, you can contact us through the **National Relay Service**:

- **TTY** users call 133 677 then ask for (03) 5422 0333
- **Speak and Listen** (speech-to-speech relay) users call 1300 555 727 then ask for (03) 5422 0333
- **Internet relay users** connect to the National Relay Service and then ask for (03) 5422 0333

If you need help with English, please call **TIS National** on 131 450 and ask them to call Macedon Ranges Shire Council on 5422 0333.



**Macedon
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Shire Council